

ROOF RATS



Fact Sheet



Roof Rat (black rat, ship rat)
Rattus rattus Linnaeus

Size

Adult head and body length is 6 to 8 inches (16 to 20 cm); tail length is 7 to 10 inches (19 to 25 cm); weight is about 5 to 9 ounces, up to 12 ounces.

Characteristics

Soft, smooth fur; pointed muzzle; large eyes; large, almost naked ears, which can be pulled over the eyes. Scaly, dark tail is longer than combined head and body length.

Color

Brown with black mixed in, to gray, to black on top with white; gray or black underside.

Droppings

Adult droppings are up to .5 inches (12.5 mm) long, and are spindle shaped with pointed ends.

Where found

Roof rats are probably from southeast Asia, but they are now found around the world. In the United States, they are most common in coastal and southern states, especially near seaports.

Habitat

Outdoors: roof rats nest in high places such as trees, but sometimes in burrows under plants.
Indoors: they nest in high places in structures, but sometimes in basements, sewers, or under buildings.

Food

Roof rats eat almost anything, but they prefer fruit, vegetables, and cereal products. They often get their water from their food. They eat a lot at one time, and will return to their food source often.

Biology

Roof rats mature in two to five months, and are adults for nine to 12 months. Pregnancy takes three weeks. Newborns get hair after one week, open eyes after about two weeks, and are weaned between three and four weeks. They have four to six litters per year, with six to eight per litter. Roof rats have keen hearing, smell, taste and touch (long whiskers), but bad vision, and they are colorblind. They are fast and can climb, jump and swim. They are nocturnal and like to explore, but are cautious and shy away from new objects.

Damage

Roof rats gnaw, eat stored food, and transmit disease by droppings and urine, bites, and the fleas and mites in their fur.

Invasion

An opening larger than .5 inches (12 mm) allows entry of roof rats into buildings.

History of Roof Rats in Maricopa County

Roof rats were first discovered in East Phoenix's Arcadia District in 2002. Not native to Arizona, the rats are believed to have been transported to Maricopa County from neighboring coastal states.

In 2004, roof rats were spotted throughout the Valley. This confirmed to the County that the rats were being transported unknowingly either through residents moving from one home to another or from residents moving into the Valley from neighboring coastal states.

Although roof rats have not been found to have disease, they are known to be destructive, gnawing through wiring and destroying citrus.

The county put up 6,000 bait stations on every telephone pole and tree on public land in Arcadia. The result was that the rats consumed only about 1 percent of the poison in the bait stations. However, an outreach effort to work with the neighborhood on eradication and prevention proved successful. The discovery -- roof rats are rodents of routine and unless driven to a foreign pole or tree, they prefer to stay in a residential backyard.

For more information, contact:

Maricopa County Environmental Services/Vector Control: (602) 506-6616,
www.maricopa.gov/envsvc.

NEIGHBORtoNEIGHBOR campaign: (602) 273-0435, www.roofrat.net.

City of Scottsdale: (480) 312-3111, www.ScottsdaleAZ.gov/health/roofrats/general.asp.